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THE  
PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE  
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

PUNISHMENT IN EDUCATION.

BY THE REV. E. J. CUNNINGHAM.

PUNISHMENT is not an easy subject to treat in a pleasant manner. The writer runs the risk of exhibiting himself as a cold-blooded monster, whose study is of those things that make child-life hard, that have to do with tears and bitterness. The truth, however, is that punishment wisely and lovingly administered, and dutifully received, is the instrument for averting, not for causing, tears and bitterness. And as to the hardness, it does not follow that that which tends to hardness is unlovely or unserviceable. On this point it is unnecessary to add a word to Mrs. Creighton's admirable paper in a past number of the *Parents' Review*. Let it be remembered that the object of education is to fit young lives for the battle of life. A weak indulgence does not attain this end; for human nature, being what it is, needs the constraining influence of discipline and correction if it is to grow towards its full ideal. A child that should grow up to adult age without the experience of discipline, enforced when necessary by punishment, would start, as most of us would agree, very poorly equipped for the race of civilised life. Common experience, therefore, suggests the lesson, that punishment, in some form or other, is a necessary factor in education. At the same time this empirical reflection may be seen to be only a particular application of a law that may



fairly be called universal. Dame Nature has, we flatter ourselves, proved herself a fairly successful nursing mother to us. She has, through the centuries, reared up her children from one development to another in a manner that demands our gratitude and admiration. And what has been her method? Would it be wrong to say that her methods begin with punishment, go on with punishment, and end with punishment? The hand that touches fire shall be burned; the life that does not suit itself to its environment shall perish in the struggle for existence. What are these but punishments? Yes; Mother Nature, if you go to her for advice, will show you how she hedges about her laws with a code of more than Draconic severity. She makes no exceptions; she shows no mercy. Parents and teachers are not indeed called upon to be Draconic. They may, they must, temper justice with gentleness and love; but if they wish to train up the young characters entrusted to their care to their fitting development, they must needs learn some of Nature's severer lessons. Faults must be checked; good habits must be formed. For the one purpose, as for the other, punishments are necessary. It may, of course, be freely admitted that an educational system of unadulterated hardness is, nowadays at any rate, unconceivable in cultivated society. Such a system, however advantageous for fostering the brute courage of a growing Spartan warrior, tends to crush his higher instincts, and if conceivable could only be conceived to be condemned. On the other hand, however, a system based only on the incentives of encouragement and reward would in nine cases out of ten prove a lamentable failure. The true ideal would seem to be that parents and teachers should *lead* where leading is possible, but that the stern propelling force of punishment should never be allowed to fall out of sight. Even praise and reward show up all the better if seen against a background of severity, and will only work effectually when contrasted with penalty. A child might like a diet of sweets, but it would hardly be considered wholesome.

Punishment then is a necessity, and yet it is to be feared that few of us realise its tremendous responsibilities. Young parents find themselves face to face with the problem presented by a child screaming in a causeless temper, refusing to go to bed when bed-time comes, passionately hurling his

toys at his sister's head, lisping out, what in nursery language is euphemistically called, a "story." What is to be done? An emergency has arisen; a mistake may mean lifelong mischief. The child must be punished. But how? And the young mother realises that she has not thought the matter out; she appeals to her husband; he is in the same predicament; he has never thought about this part of a parent's responsibility. And the result? Possibly success—a wise and wholesome punishment, followed by a childish repentance; but also, possibly a muddle and a failure: an unsuitable or excessive punishment on the one hand, or on the other hand, a ruinous policy of weakness and *laissez faire*.

The fact is that the philosophy of punishment has still got to be thought out. But until the needful philosopher for this task appears, it may be possible for those on whom the responsibility of punishment falls, to think out for themselves a few general principles, which may serve as a guide in discharging their duty. Whatever we have to do, it is worth while to try and do it well; and for doing things well a little forethought and a little method are indispensable.

Now in seeking to lay down some broad principles which may regulate the practice of punishment, there seems to meet us at the outset this thought, for which we are again indebted to Nature. If there is one thing more apparent than another about her punishments, it is that she punishes for the good of her children, not in anger, but by law. Translate this into the sphere of the nursery and the schoolroom, and we learn that a good and righteous punishment must aim at the good of the child. It must not be a vent for the irritation of the punisher. He who punishes in anger, in nine cases out of ten punishes badly, and does more harm than good. There is a deep truth enshrined in the words of a wise man of old time who says:—"Ye parents, provoke not your children to wrath." Nothing is more calculated to produce such a result than punishment that proceeds from a fretful irritation on the parents' part. Above all things, avoid "nagging" at your children. Never let them feel that you punish to relieve your own feelings.

We may next consider what should be the aim of a punishment. It must in the first instance, be *retributive*; and by this we mean that from the first pains should be taken to let



the growing intellect take in the fact that punishment is not a matter of accident, but that it follows as the consequence of a fault. "If I do this or that, I suffer for it," ought to be one of the earliest generalisations that the infant mind forms for itself. Such ideas do not spring up spontaneously. They must grow, and the sooner they grow the better. If they begin to grow in the nursery, so much the less friction will there be in the school-room. If they are firmly planted among the stock of ideas that a boy or girl learns at home, there is so much the better foundation laid for school, so much the less to unlearn before school discipline can take effect. And this raises the question, at what age should punishment begin? Here, it is obvious, no general rule can possibly be laid down. The mental development of children varies so enormously; the dispositions that have to be reckoned with are so infinitely various, that what would be right and wise in one case may well be foolish and wrong in another. But all who have had to do with young children will probably agree that there comes in each individual case an easily recognisable period, when a child begins to understand what is said to it, and as soon as this age is reached, punishment, when necessary, may begin. As soon as a child can understand, "you must not do that," it can begin to learn that "must" means "must," and it is mistaken kindness to postpone the learning of this lesson a year or a month too long. It is a good rule in most matters to begin at the beginning. The deepest and most abiding of our stock of ideas are those which, having been sown in infancy, have grown with our growth, unconsciously twining themselves round the innermost fibres of our nature and disposition.

Retribution then, or punishment as a penalty, may have its place in the earliest phases of education. But it is a very incomplete notion of punishment that considers it only as looking backwards. It must have a forward look, and become *preventive*. The generalisation, "If I do this or that, I suffer," must widen into, "I will not do this or that, because I have suffered for it before, and do not want to suffer again." We do not mean to say that conscious reasoning of this kind goes forward in the childish mind; it may do so in one who has grown out of infancy, but even here the process we are thinking of may, perhaps, be rather described as instinctive

than as the result of conscious reasoning. In any case, the point to be here noted for the guidance of the punisher is that, to be effectual, penalties must not be capricious, but fairly certain in their application. If the young mind is to form for itself the added generalisation that makes punishment an effectual preventive, we must take pains to be uniform and patient in administering it. It does not do to give a child a slap or two upon its little hand for some childish offence one day, and the next day under the same circumstances to bribe it to obedience with a lump of sugar. This is trifling with punishment, and deprives it of its effect. Above all things in dealing with children, let the "yea" and "nay" of one day be the "yea" and "nay" of the next also. So only can discipline in general, and punishment in particular, proceed from the retributive to the preventive level. And this necessity for consistency and uniformity in matters of discipline will appear in a yet clearer light if we remember that besides the retributive and preventive effects of punishment, it may be regarded as *exemplary*. And by this we mean that the experience of one child may be made to produce its deterrent effects on others. When several children are growing up side by side, a little tact and a judicious word by way of pointing a moral may effect perhaps an economy in punishment, whereby the penalty paid by one child may be made effectual for the family. And this reflection gives point to another, which otherwise might seem superfluous. There must be no favouritism, no passing over of a fault in one child, that is punished in the case of another. If punishment is to be exemplary it must be impartial as well as uniform. A punishment inflicted in this spirit will speak not only to the actual culprit, but serve as a useful object lesson, in which the brothers and sisters will feel that they are interested parties. On this point it may serve as food for reflection to remember that there was in rude times a basis of sound reason for public executions!

We proceed now to consider a few special points connected with our subject. And, first, it is a great mistake, in our opinion, to think that punishments need to be severe. There are cases, of course, which must be dealt with severely; and conscientious parents, who desire to do their duty by their children, must not shrink from the responsibility of inflicting



severe chastisement if, unfortunately, the need should arise. But let it be noted that the necessity for a severe punishment in many, if not most, cases will be found to arise from the failure, that deserves the epithet of cowardly, to begin with gentler punishments at an earlier age. It is not kindness, it is not true love, to wait to punish until there is a serious offence. A wise discipline will begin at the beginning, as has before been said. And this contention carries with it as a corollary the further principle that punishment, certainly in its earlier stages, must be gentle; as firm as you like—the firmer the better—consistent, patient, but not severe. For, in the first place, undue severity has a tendency to harden, rather than to correct. Sometimes this risk must be run; but it should only be in exceptional cases requiring exceptional treatment. And, secondly, severity is not needful in order to produce effect. In dealing with children we deal with very tender, very susceptible natures. The “suffering” spoken of in a former paragraph may be of the very slightest kind that can be felt. If it is felt, that is probably enough; if it is not enough the first time, perhaps it will be so the second or the third. We need not feel that it is necessary to produce a startling impression. Nature, to return to her example once more, sometimes works by a sudden catastrophe, but more often by steps so minute as to elude observation. So should it be with punishments. We must not be in a hurry nor despond if a fault is repeated after being gently punished. We must just repeat the punishment, dealing it out, as it were, in homœopathic doses.

The various modes of penalty next seem to call for notice. But it would be manifestly beyond the scope of the present article to enter into detail upon this head. It must be left to the coming philosopher to discourse of the value and efficacy of this form of punishment and of that. For the armoury of the domestic punisher is infinitely various, and the selection of a penalty, like the fisherman's choice of his fly, must be guided by the thousand-and-one varying conditions of time, place and circumstance. The question, however, is sometimes asked, “Should a penalty always be made to come out of the offence?” No doubt, if some simple and rational mode presents itself of converting the offence into its own penalty, so much the better. Herein probably

all will agree; but such a principle rigidly adhered to would produce fantastic results. A child who should be punished only on this theory would never know what to expect. The element of certainty would be taken from punishment, and it would tend to become the expression of the caprice of the moment, a very unfortunate result. While, therefore, as a matter of theoretical reasoning, there may seem to be much in favour of such a system, yet in practice it will probably be found that only a small proportion of childish offences can be so dealt with. Let it be remembered that punishment is intended, in the first instance, to act as a deterrent, and let that punishment be chosen, whatever may be its shape, that most tends to this result.

And now arises an important point. If it be enquired what form of punishment is best for little children, for his own part, the writer ventures, at the risk of seeming old-fashioned, to stand up for the judicially administered slap. It is the mode of punishment that best comes home to the dawning powers of perception and reflection. It is soonest over, and leaves the least bitterness behind; it requires less repetition than any other mode of punishment. This, I venture to think, will be the experience of most parents who have appealed to it. There is something almost comic in the expression of astonishment in a naughty child's face, when for the first time thus corrected, and the almost instantaneous return to complacency and good humour that often follows. Only beware of the angry slap. Here especially there is room to remember the golden rule that forbids punishment in anger.

As intelligence grows, penalties may be suited to the offence; and he will punish best and most wisely who most studies character and disposition. An appeal may now be made to the higher faculties. The body is now no longer the only way of getting at a child's feelings. Shame, for instance, will be found a potent penalty; for there is no better way of punishing than to make the child feel ashamed of itself. One may, for instance, insist upon the open confession of a fault. Confession of itself is a penalty to many a child, and has the advantage of tending to repentance and genuine sorrow. It has a softening influence, and, if not a sufficient penalty in itself, should always carry with it a



mitigation of punishment. In this way, or some other, it will be found that the higher feelings may be appealed to. Nor need it be more than simply stated, that herein lies the supremest art of domestic punishment.

No mention has hitherto been made of school punishments, and the subject is almost too important to come in at the fag end of an article. Still some mention must be made of this part of the matter in hand. It is generally understood that the schoolmaster is *in loco parentis*; that the natural authority of the parent to punish is delegated to the teacher. And it is on this principle that the schoolmaster punishes. The worst of it is that the schoolmaster is sometimes expected to give the child entrusted to his care its first experience of punishment. "There will be plenty of time for correction when the boy goes to school," is the reflection with which many parents may be imagined to salve their consciences. Let it be, however, remembered that this is fair neither to the master or the child. By all means let the master undertake the responsibility of punishment, but it is not fair to let him have the monopoly of it. If he is to be *in loco parentis*, it is hardly fair that the parent should do all the petting, and leave discipline to the master; nor is it well for the boy whose lot it is to be so treated. School discipline, to be effectual, must be but the accentuation of a discipline that has begun at home.

Mrs. Creighton, in an article already referred to, well describes the old-fashioned idea of a schoolmaster's duty to his boys. "Their one object," she says, "was to get the boy to learn; they regarded boy nature as in itself evil, and their business was by compulsion and many blows to force him into the right way." We have now "changed all that"—whether for better or worse, in the interests of learning, who shall say? It is now generally understood that the master who cannot teach without a cane on his desk before him, ought not to teach at all, and corporal punishment for mere failure to learn a lesson is practically unknown. Such failure may be magnified by repetition into rebellion against authority, and so (in a boys' school) may come within the reach of the cane, but otherwise some other mode of punishment is now universally substituted. And here let it be noted that it is often a delicate problem for a teacher to decide whether the failure to learn arises from idleness or natural

slowness. To punish stupidity is as cruel as to punish blindness, and equally useless with any idea of a cure. To cope with stupidity is at once the greatest trial of the teacher's patience, and also should be the highest triumph of his art. Punishment here should be charily used. The stupid boy should be encouraged, and helped, in giving more time to the preparation of his work beforehand, instead of being mechanically punished after failure. But who shall say where stupidity ends, and mere idleness and inattention begins? If boys' nature is no longer to be regarded as essentially evil, yet it must be admitted that nine out of ten are naturally averse to study, and must more or less be driven along the road to learning. Hence the necessity for punishments and all the routine of "lines," "detention," "extra drill," etc. Most of such punishments are in their way objectionable, but most objectionable of all is that which is known as "lines." What the treadmill is to the convict, such are "lines" to the schoolboy, a heart-wearing, useless toil, having the effect of spoiling his handwriting and dulling his intellectual perception. Who can appreciate Virgil, when his most vivid association with him carries the mind to a weary half-holiday afternoon spent in writing him out as "lines." It is really time that the inventive genius of the schoolmaster should rise above this form of punishment. The suggestion may perhaps be pardoned that a fixed time to be spent in some useful work might be found a substitute for this most mischievous form of punishment; and if lines must be set, let the number be few, and good writing insisted upon. It is in respect of idleness and inattention that the principle already alluded to of making the penalty arise out of the offence can be most readily put into practice.

The remark has been made that such punishments as "detention" and "extra drill" are also objectionable; and the reason for this, as it seems to the writer, is that they tend to separate punishment from the offence, and so lessen the effect. In the matter of punishment, the saying is specially true, *bis dat qui cito dat*; or, to parody a familiar proverb, a punishment in hand is worth two in the bush. Such forms of penalty cannot of course be dispensed with altogether, and they may well have a legitimate place in the routine of school life; but



they must not be relied upon to produce much deterrent effect; in other words they are not good punishments. Similar reasoning points to the necessity of not banishing the cane altogether. An experience of many years spent in the education of boys, has convinced the writer of two things: first, that the less the cane is used the better: but secondly, that its presence in the master's desk must be a felt reality. It must be there to be appealed to in an emergency. It is in many cases the most merciful, and in all cases (unless too frequent use vulgarises it) the most effectual punishment. But let it be remembered that the effect of corporal punishment is in proportion to the rarity of its infliction. The free use of a cane in school cannot be too strongly condemned. But the fact remains, that, wisely and sparingly used, and reserved, as it may well be, for the chastisement of moral offences or rebellion against authority, it gives a stability to discipline that cannot be ensured by other means. It must appear from time to time, to put itself in evidence; but its best work is done while under lock and key.

The remark just made leads to a general reflection with which this article may well be brought to a close. It is not only the actual infliction of punishment that is effectual. If the child has learned to realise that the system under which it is being trained includes the possibility of penalty, or rather the certainty of penalty, if deserved, then punishment has probably done its work. We are not thinking here of the vicious or incorrigible, but of the ordinary every-day boy or girl of our experience. Wisely treated, such children seldom require punishment. But let it be remembered that the wise treatment spoken of must include sufficient firmness and severity to implant the instinct that sees, or rather feels, that though punishment may stand in the background, yet it is there as a possibility. Thus used, and thus avoided, punishment becomes what it should be, a kind of back-bone, so to speak, to education—out of sight, but giving firmness and consistency to the whole.

## THE CHILD OF TO-DAY.

BY GRACE GWYNNE.

It is many years since that bright long summer's day we spent in the mountains, C., S., and I, and had that delightful talk which has lingered in my memory ever since, a talk which quickened our feet through the fields of heather, and made the miles fly by on the white dusty road, and the thought of which will ever be associated with the beautiful scenery through which we passed. Our argument was upon the formative influence of mind over body, and *vice versa*. The lady, a gifted and charming woman, took up her position, with Kingsley, on the idea, "The soul built for itself a home to dwell in"; and held that the spiritual and intellectual nature, if allowed free play and properly developed, would eventually mould, subdue, and transform the merely physical or animal nature. But the man, one whose literary tastes and scientific knowledge gave him the right to speak, assured us on the other hand that modern thought and scientific materialism permitted no such theory; that the possibilities of the mental are strictly limited by the physical, that every child is born into this world with its brain like a map, its powers and talents clearly defined as are the bounds of land and ocean, as little to be altered, as impossible to supply with elements left lacking by nature. This thought took deep root in my mind, and, added to observation, reading and experience, has formed the nucleus of many other thoughts upon the education of children.

If my metaphysical friends were *both* right, as I am inclined to think, and the two theories not really at variance but acting and reacting one upon another, what a light does this throw upon the right training and possible destinies of the child and our part towards it as parents! If the brain, to employ another simile, be indeed but as a palette of colours, surely the soul is the artist, and the quality of the life-pictures painted is more dependent on the hand that holds the brush than on the limited number and quality of the pigments furnished by nature! Some of our children